

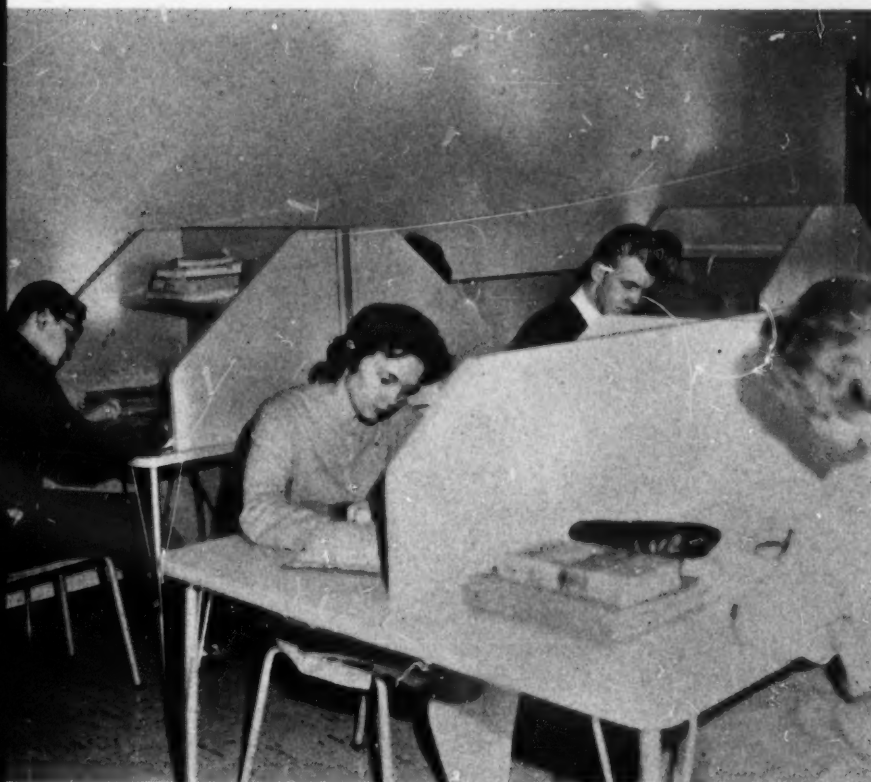
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Independent study programs developed from the connection that the student should be encouraged to initiate inquiry and to assume greater self-reliance in the learning process. The team teaching set-up was used; several faculty members worked with individual students in tutorial programs. Independent study areas, furnished with carrels and tables, as well as a large multi-purpose lecture-study room, were established. In order to learn, a student should assume an active, rather than a passive, role. He should work alone, for moments of quiet contemplation and reflection are moments of real learning. Thus, independent study should be apart from the confines of textbooks, lectures, and discussion. The role of the faculty person was that of mentor, and he should be perceptive, should guide without leading, and be competent in the subject matter. Selection of students was based on academic aptitude and motivation, as well as the student's individual responsibility. However, programs should be developed to better recognize these students.							
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WASHINGTON

**INDEPENDENT
STUDY
PROJECT**



1963



LOUIS BRUNO

**STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON**

AN INQUIRY INTO INDEPENDENT STUDY

A report of an inquiry into the need for independent study opportunities
for high school students

By Miss Janet Smith
Shoreline Public Schools
Seattle 55, Washington

LOUIS BRUNO
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Olympia, Washington

Research Project No. 03-01

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Prepared under the staff supervision of
the State Office of Public Instruction

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September 1962

S H O R E L I N E P U B L I C S C H O O L S

N. E. 158th and 20th Avenue N. E.

Seattle 55, Washington

Central Office

September 26, 1962

C
O
P
Y

Mr. Louis Bruno
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Olympia, Washington

Dear Mr. Bruno:

Shoreline High School has begun a program designed to encourage and to provide opportunity for a number of responsible students to pursue learning on an individual basis. A basic part of that program is a study made by Miss Janet Smith, entitled An Inquiry into Independent Study, a copy of which is hereby transmitted to you for approval of your department.

Several Shoreline High School people have been instrumental in promoting the program of independent study. The inspiration and leadership have come from Mr. Ed Hasselblad, the principal. Working with him are Mr. George Soltman, vice principal; Mr. Dick Lander, head of the English Department; and Miss Janet Smith, counselor. Mr. Harold Huseby, Director of Secondary Education, has also assisted.

This report would not have been possible had not Dr. Ray Jongeward, Director of Research, realized its possibilities as an aid to high schools throughout the state. His understanding, enthusiasm and cooperation deserve our deep appreciation. Our thanks go, also, to the Research Advisory Committee members who have given their approval for financial support to the study.

The grant provided has been a stimulus that will go far beyond this report; through the findings of the Inquiry will come guidelines for more effective study on the part of many students in many high schools. We are grateful for the encouragement, through the grant that resulted in this report, to the State Department of Public Instruction and those connected with the Research Office.

Respectfully yours,

/s/ Ray W. Howard

Ray W. Howard
Superintendent of Schools

RH:bb

INTRODUCTION

The faculty at Shoreline High School directed its attention to independent study two years ago. This interest grew from the conviction that the student must be encouraged to initiate inquiry and to assume greater self-reliance in the learning process.

Gradual adaptations in established procedures were attempted. Team teaching sections were developed in which students were given increased responsibility in the learning process. Several faculty members collaborated with individual students in tutorial programs. Independent study cards were issued to approximately two hundred selected students. These cards allowed the students to select their own study areas within the building and provided them with free access to library facilities.

In order to extend the independent study program this year, the Shoreline School District has allocated funds for physical plant expansion. An independent study area is being furnished with carrels (private cubicles) and tables. A large multi-purpose lecture-study room is being added to the present plant.

As its independent study program develops, the Shoreline faculty recognizes the need for a more formalized consideration of some basic questions: What kinds of students can profit best from independent study? What is the appropriate subject matter for independent study? How can the faculty encourage independent learning? What special provisions in the physical plant are necessary to accommodate an independent study program? What changes in staff utilization are necessary? How can a school evaluate its program?

The answers to these questions may not be quickly resolved. It is important that the questions be asked. An honest examination of an educational venture by a faculty can contribute to better instruction in all areas. The following inquiry explores some of the questions relevant to independent study.

The Purpose and Intent of Independent Study

Increased attention has been directed during the past several years to independent study at the secondary level. Reflected in this interest is a reaffirmation of the student's responsibility in the learning process. To learn, the student, must assume an active rather than passive role. "Information about learners dictates that learning must start with the person doing the learning. Teachers cannot do things to individuals to educate them. Individuals must do things to and for themselves."¹ The student becomes a truly active participant in the learning process when he initiates inquiry and searches out answers on his own.

Reflected also is an awareness that real learning often takes place during moments of quiet contemplation and reflection when the student is without the immediate supervision and direction of the teacher. He may be working out an experiment in a laboratory, thinking through a problem in mathematics, or doing research in a library. Whatever his activity, the student's concentration and involvement outside the classroom is a measure of his capacity to learn. The ability to study independently is a mark of a good student. It is also the mark of a responsible citizen in a democratic society. And yet, in many cases, established school procedures appear to be incompatible with the development of independent study skills. In his recent book Focus on Change, J. Lloyd Trump comments on some of the incongruities in our educational structure:

Instead of providing for independent learning, school organization in most cases serves to chalk the student's steps clear across the educational stage. School bells begin and end the day and punctuate the beginning and ending of each class period. School scheduling as presently practiced usually locks library and laboratory for individual students except during brief periods of the school day. Instruction in each subject is cut and tailored until each unit fits a pattern designed for orderly administration.

Directed and supported at virtually every step of the way through high school, too many students find it difficult to travel on their own when they reach college or go to work on a job. Few high school graduates have achieved adequately in the skill of independent study, nor has much happened to make them feel they should.²

If today's educative practices are to produce individuals who can make substantial contributions to a changing world, educators must find a better way to encourage students to initiate inquiry and to become independent learners. It may well be that a deeper inquiry into the aspects of independent study can contribute to more effective instruction in the schools and to a more responsible citizenry in a free society.

The Subject Matter of Independent Study

In his book Education and the Human Quest, Herbert A. Thelen warns that all too often the schools stifle honest inquiry "for they collapse inquiry to mere problem solving, and they keep the student busy finding 'solutions' to 'problems' that are already formulated, externalized, depersonalized, and emotionally fumigated."³ This observation echoes the earlier criticism of education by H. A. Overstreet, who saw dangerous restrictions placed on inquiry in too many schools:

Students, naturally, are taught to think within limits. The outstanding characteristic of average education is that these limits to thought are not talked about; they are fixed by the lessons assigned. Students are required to know what their textbooks and teachers tell them. They are not exposed to other materials that might move them to new doubts and curiosities. If they did happen upon these materials, there would be no scholastic profit to be derived from studying them; there would be no occasion for handing them back to the teacher. They belong to some order of being that is not that of the curriculum. When students know enough of what their textbooks and teachers have told them, they are supposedly ready to go forth into life.⁴

If the criticisms of Thelen and Overstreet are valid, then the subject matter of independent study must somehow transcend the bounds of the textbook, lecture, and discussion. It must lead the student along intellectual paths that, for him at least, are exploratory ventures into the unknown. He must formulate his own questions and search out his own answers.

The literature suggests that little attention has been given to the appropriate subject matter of independent study. Students have been freed from study hall supervision, put to work on special projects, and given unlimited access to school libraries. All this has been done in the name of independence and self-reliance. To date, no school has reported complete satisfaction with its program. Unfortunately, these schools have written little about the types of study their students were pursuing. Trump reports that

Schools that experiment with independent study find it difficult to stimulate even the most able students to do truly creative, independent work. They are accustomed to doing only what the teacher assigns and little more. Teachers' assignments have left little room in many cases for the exercise of initiative. Thus in some of the studies what was supposed to be independent study looked quite similar to the homework that usually occurs.⁵

One suspects that we too often equate disciplined behavior with intellectual independence. We are so pleasantly surprised that students can behave themselves without the supervision of the study hall teacher that we forget to look for other outcomes. And so we end up evaluating our programs in terms of social behavior rather than intellectual development.

The Role of the Faculty Mentor

Except in those schools where freedom from study hall supervision constitutes the scope of independent study, the assumption is made that a faculty member participates with the student in his intellectual pursuit. His role is that of a mentor, and he provides guidance throughout the study. The importance of the mentor is stated by Harold K. Schilling in an article on independent study at the college level. Its thesis is applicable to the secondary level.

It is not study carried out in utter isolation, by a student who is completely on his own -- though too often in practice it amounts to just that. I doubt that independence and self-reliance can be achieved that way. They develop only, I believe, in an environment of difficulty, reaction, challenge, opposition, the necessity to

make choices among alternatives, and alternating failure and success. Criticism, judicious advice, occasional praise, sympathetic understanding are also helpful for optimum growth in self-dependence....It is a delicate business that calls for great skill on the part of the teacher. It is not a matter of simply dropping the student in the water and departing after telling him that he is on his own in learning to swim.⁶

It is unlikely that productive study can be realized without the guidance of a perceptive mentor. But Schilling's mentor calls for more talents and insights than many of us in education possess -- or, more kindly perhaps, can muster on the spur of the moment. The mentor must be sensitive to what Jerome S. Bruner calls the intuitive idea.

It requires a sensitive teacher to distinguish an intuitive mistake -- an interestingly wrong leap -- from a stupid or ignorant mistake, and it requires a teacher who can give approval and correction simultaneously to the intuitive student. To know a subject so thoroughly that he can go easily beyond the textbook is a great deal to ask of a high school teacher.⁷

In other words, the mentor must be perceptive of individual thinking processes; he must be able to guide without leading; and he must be competent in subject matter. Trump suggests that this kind of teaching requires abilities unto itself and some teachers may learn to be more skilled in guiding independent study than others.⁸

A faculty that participates seriously in an evaluation of its independent study program must explore the role of the mentor and consider its influence on the outcomes of the program.

The Selection of Students

Experimentation with independent study at Antioch College led to the hypothesis that "the factors determining success in independent study are primarily attitude, motivation, and other traits of personality rather than academic abilities."⁹

The conclusion at Antioch was that further experimental studies "designed to

throw light on the relation of these personality factors to autonomously conducted learning are therefore needed."¹⁰

The high school population presents a much wider range of academic aptitudes than does the student body at Antioch College. We do not know at what point, if any, academic aptitude becomes a prominent factor in determining success. Nonetheless, the hypothesis does suggest that motivation may be a more important factor than suspected. Research in this area is already under way. The results of a recent experimental study in motivation at the University of Chicago suggest that some students may be more comfortable with an independent study program than are others.¹¹ An assortment of motivational factors, or "psyche needs," were found operative within a group of 216 students. Referring to this study, Thelen reports that the "largest factors accounting for about 12 percent of the data, is one we call the 'goody-goody' factor."¹²

It is contributed to by all the scores through which a child says how well he likes things -- teachers, ways of working, goals, other kids, and so on. It is also contributed to by scores which, taken together, give a picture of conformity: the student who is high on this factor likes everything expected of him, no matter what it is. It is accompanied by rather low-level work, and by lack of emotional involvement. There is rejection of fight and flight, and of all but rather muted expressions of feeling. We could not help but wonder if this factor doesn't portray a highly successful adjustment to the demands of the typical classroom; and, if so, it should probably be called the 'survival factor.'¹³

Ten different motivational factors were listed in this particular study. An interesting aspect of Thelen's investigation is that students appear to differ greatly in their preferences for methods of instruction. Some prefer activities involving a structured presentation of course content; others favor a looser organization. Some like to make decisions on their own; others prefer the security of group decisions. This and similar studies made at the University of Chicago have suggested to Thelen

that "students seem to work best in particular kinds of social organizations. Thus one student seems to work problems best by himself; a second works best with a buddy; a third does better with a small clique; and a fourth is least distracted and most stimulated in a larger group."¹⁴

There is thus some evidence to suggest that high academic aptitude may not be the prime consideration in identifying students who can best profit from an independent study program. There is even some reason to believe that the "responsible" student, or good citizen, is not always the best candidate for independent study. He may, in fact, find autonomous activity uncomfortable. If we assume that there are some students who could do their most effective learning by means of an independent study program, then we must initiate experimental programs to identify these persons.

This is not to suggest that an independent study program should be established for the autonomous student alone. Many who advocate independent study see in it a means of developing independent learners. Elizabeth Paschal in Encouraging the Excellent urges that "students at every grade of the school system should be taught how to learn more independently, so that we can make better use of the greatest of all educational resources, the capacity of the individual to learn."¹⁵ And Lloyd Trump recommends that forty percent of every student's schedule in high school be devoted to independent study.¹⁶

Whether independent study can help students towards autonomy is still subject to study. Antioch College has arrived at the hypothesis that "the teacher's absence from the student or his presence has little correlation with the student's independence of the teacher, and thus has little to do directly with the testing of what can be accomplished in independent study."¹⁷ In other words, we do not really know how or under what conditions an independent study program develops the habit of independent learning. Further experimental investigation is necessary.

Physical Facilities and Staff Utilization

Independent study requires that students have areas within the school to study independently. Traditional building designs dictate group rather than individual activities. Large numbers of students are scheduled into study halls which tend to be "cavernous rooms lined with rows of seats or equipped only with chairs, tables, and spitballs."¹⁸ Libraries are little better.

Independent study also requires that students have easy access to study materials. Modern technology is providing us with a greater variety of these materials. Today, books and magazines are being supplemented with such items as film strips and prerecorded tapes. The task of providing students with appropriate materials involves more than unencumbered entrance to the library. Space must be provided to house the wide variety of study materials. Finally, independent study programs that bring student and teacher together in joint intellectual pursuit demand that teaching schedules be adjusted to provide time for the venture.

In such recently constructed schools as Wayland and Ridgewood, individual study areas and resource centers have been provided by the architects. Flexible scheduling has provided teachers time to work more closely with individual students. Current literature on school building programs indicates that the blueprints of many schools not yet built provide some space for study carrels and for resource centers.

But for the large majority of schools, physical facilities and problems of staff utilization impede the development of independent study programs. Fortunately, these are tangible problems. With community support, building adaptations can be made to provide space for at least some students to study independently. And some progress can be made in flexible scheduling. It is likely that the more perplexing problems lie in the areas of curriculum and teaching method.

Recent Programs in Independent Study

A relatively few secondary schools have thus far introduced independent study programs. Among the schools that have ventured into independent study is Wayland High School in Wayland, Massachusetts. Here independent study is an integral part of the curricular design.

The Wayland school people believed that only the individually responsible student would be propelled by a desire to investigate and seek answers for himself. They came to the conclusion that the system should place a larger share of the responsibility for accomplishment on the student. They hoped the students coming out of the Wayland schools would be self-directed individuals able to perform organized, independent work and impelled by a socially useful and approved purpose.¹⁹

Other schools that have instituted independent study programs are found in Illinois: Ridgewood High School, Norridge; Urbana High School, Urbana; University High School, Urbana; Community High School, Fairchild; Evanston Township High School, Evanston; Fairfield High School, Fairfield.

In California the Petaluma City Schools has "experimented with a tutorial method to maximize the teacher's contact with talented students."²⁰ And in Oregon the Bend Senior High School has "allowed blocks of time for students to be free of supervision."²¹

The scope and design of these programs differ from school to school. Since the programs are relatively new, more time will be needed to evaluate their outcomes. Meanwhile, reports indicate difficulties not uncommon to new ventures.

At Ridgewood High School, where instruction is organized around team teaching, seminars, and independent study, the school reports that

Among difficulties encountered, Ridgewood teachers rank individual study as the most perplexing as well as potentially most fruitful. Results during the first year were something less than hoped for. They hypothesize that this may be partly a function of the newness of the program to the students and lack of specific instruction in reading techniques, research methods, and organization of study time will lead to improved performance in coming years.²²

At Bend Senior High School, where students are freed from study supervision, an

evaluative committee reports that the "strengths...appear to outweigh any possible weaknesses."²³ However, the committee does list several difficulties arising out of the program, such as attendance abuses and lack of self-direction carry-over in other classes. Among the recommendations for improvement is a suggestion that the student council assume greater responsibility in student orientation and attendance enforcement.

More sophisticated evaluative studies are found at the college level where independent study programs have been in effect for many years. It is estimated that in 1957 twenty-six percent of the four year institutions in this country had such programs.²⁴ General summaries of the evaluative studies made by colleges are presented in two publications: The Independent Study Program in the United States²⁵ and Independent Study.²⁶

It is true that the findings of these studies are not always applicable to the secondary level. The student populations differ in age and in range of academic aptitudes. Differences in educational responsibilities and organization are also apparent. Nonetheless, the colleges have had some experience in developing and evaluating their own independent study programs, and secondary schools can hardly ignore the work already done in this area by the colleges.

Conclusion

The published reports from independent study schools indicate sustained commitment to this method of instruction. One hopes that as schools have an opportunity to examine their programs over the next several years, more substantial evaluation will be evident. Schools must clarify objectives. They must also formulate assumptions -- assumptions about the students participating in the programs, about the nature of the subject matter they are to deal with, about the role of the faculty, and about the physical facilities. They must be prepared to examine these assumptions carefully and honestly. Evaluation based on less than this will reveal little useful information about independent study.

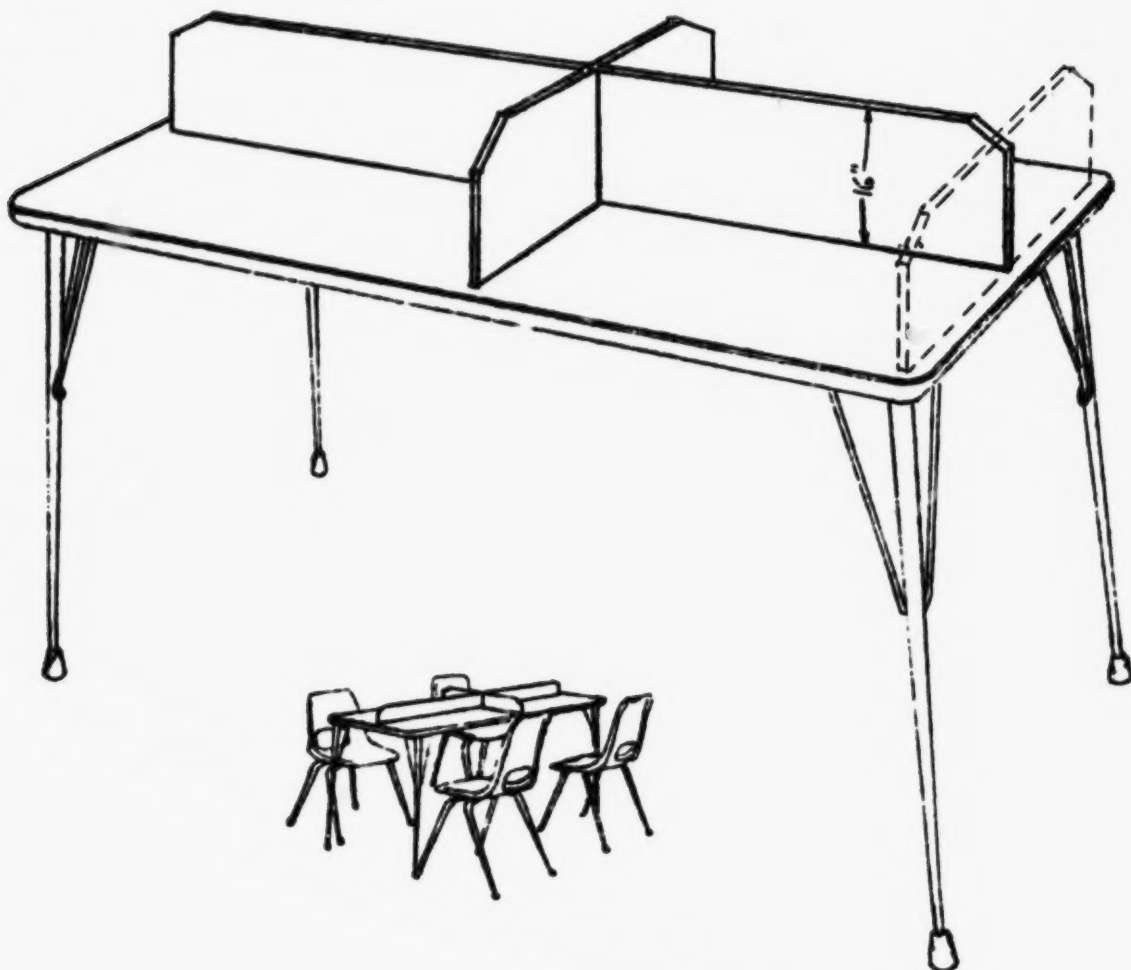
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